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Re-Construction

From the Viewpoint of Labor

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Re-Construction

The strike is over. Its immediate ends have not been attained. But the workers have had a splendid training in economics and are united as never before. They may not all be perfectly clear as to just where they are going, but they know that they are "on the way."

The time has now come when we must figuratively sit down and ask ourselves two questions: (1), What do we want? (2), How are we to get it? We shall need the combined wisdom of all to enable us to put into words the aspirations of labor and then to determine upon the practical measures that are most likely to prove effective. The following suggestions are a personal contribution to the formation of a reconstruction programme for Canada on which it may ultimately be possible to unite organized labor, farmers, returned men and the "progressives" among the middle classes of our towns and cities.

1. Our ultimate object must be a complete turnover in the present economic and social system. In this we recognize our solidarity with the workers the world over.

This is frankly "revolutionary," but does not look at all in the direction of a violent bloody revolution. At present things are wrong-side up. We propose to turn them right-side up. A very small percentage of the people in Canada control the wealth and determine the policy of Canada. We propose an industrial democracy in which the business of this country will be carried on not for the enrichment of a few, but for the well-being of the many.

Such a revolution is that contemplated by the British Labor Party, now the Opposition in the British House of Commons, and likely within a short time to be "the Government."

In the now famous draft report on reconstruction we read "we need to beware of patchwork. The view of the Labor Party is that what has to be reconstructed after the war is not this or that Government Department, or this or that piece of social machinery, but, so far as Britain is concerned, society itself. . . . We must insure that what is presently to be built up is a new social order, based not on fighting but on fraternity—not on the competitive struggle for the means of bare life, but on a deliberately planned co-operation in production and distribution for the benefit of all who participate by hand or brain—not on the utmost possible inequality of riches, but on a systematic approach toward a healthy equality of material

circumstances for every person born into the world—not on an enforced dominion over subject nations, subject races, subject colonies, subject classes, or a subject sex, but in industry, as well as in government, on that equal freedom, that general consciousness of consent, and that widest possible participation in power both economic and political, which is characteristic of Democracy.”

2. Such a change, we hope, will be accomplished in this country by means of education, organization and the securing by the workers of the machinery of government. We look forward to the formation of a Canadian organization broad enough to include all producers.

We do not want chaos and bloodshed in Canada. Radical changes are inevitable. The flood that is devastating Europe will reach our own shores. The attempt to drive it back will prove futile if not disastrous. We still have the chance to so direct and regulate its coming that, as the Nile in Egypt it may enrich our civilization with new social deposits of inestimable value.

If those in authority harden their hearts and refuse to let the people go, the people may, in desperation, resort to violent methods to attain their rights. But physical force provokes reaction. It is negative in character. It is an attempted short cut that delays rather than hastens permanent reform. We believe that moral ends can be attained only by the use of moral means. Hence we emphasize the education of the people and the banding them together for political action.

The fight is not between hand workers and brain workers. It is not between industrial workers and agricultural workers. The fight is essentially between the producers and the parasites—between those who are making a real contribution to social welfare and those who are living on the fruit of other men's labors. The people should unite to overthrow the profiteers.

3. While realizing the inadequacy of the present system of representative government we believe in using it as one means of securing more power; even a minority in our administrative bodies could accomplish much.

Many, despairing of accomplishing anything through “political action,” would rely entirely upon “direct action”—on using industrial power, as in a general strike, to gain their rights. How the co-operative commonwealth may finally be brought about no one can say, but at present direct action has its limitations. So long as the Government controls the military and the courts, and so long as the people have any possibility whatever of electing their representatives they are bound to take the fullest advantage of this opportunity of securing at least a fighting chance. Admittedly our present parliamentary system is far from being “truly representative government.” It may perhaps be used as an instrument for introducing a better

system. If not, at least its power may be curbed by the publicity possible at elections and from the floor of the house. We must attack the enemy all along the line, using both political and industrial power, and any other legitimate power at our disposal.

4. Without losing sight of our ultimate objective, we believe in taking advantage of every opportunity to better our conditions. In this way we attain a stronger position from which to carry on the fight.

In one sense—and in one sense only—we are opportunists. We refuse to compromise our principles, but we regard every foot of ground taken as a distinct gain, and some times we would even pause to “consolidate” our position before advancing to another attack.

Popular education, shorter hours, prohibition of intoxicating liquors, prohibition of child labor—these and similar “reforms” are advocated not as “palliatives,” but as various means by which we may increase our fighting efficiency.

5. With the world situation changing so rapidly it is impossible to lay down a detailed permanent programme. On the other hand our present pressing needs, so far as possible, must be met.

Canada is very dependent upon the United States and England, and these countries are being profoundly influenced by developments in Europe. We cannot tell what a day may bring forth. We cannot plan far ahead. On the other hand, we are facing the high cost of living: we are threatened with unemployment, we are subjected to autocratic authority. We must take action in the near future. At this time we can at least lay down some guiding principles, and suggest what their application might mean to our national life.

IMMEDIATE MEASURES

While we advocate a complete change in our social and economic system we realize that in the attainment of this objective many obstacles must be successively overcome and ever-changing problems dealt with. The programme must, of necessity, vary to meet the needs of new situations as they arise. A party in the minority cannot effectively advocate the far-reaching measures that are possible when the party is returned with a majority.

In this section we present our immediate demands. Labor representatives inside or outside the house of parliament will press for certain measures that will relieve the situation which is at present becoming intolerable.

1. (a) Repeal of all war time legislation and regulations restricting freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of meeting, freedom of association (b) freedom of political (including working-class) prisoners (c) abolition of government by orders in council.

Under color and pressure of military necessity, arbitrary authority has been set up or exercised and the freedom of the individual has been much curtailed. Now that the war is over we demand the full restoration of the "ancient rights of the British people" and other rights which through the centuries have been won by our fathers with much struggle and at great sacrifice.

2. Generous provision for soldiers and their dependents. The men who have risked their lives for their country must never be regarded as objects of charity, but have a claim on the resources of the country. Surely this should be accepted by all, and yet returned men in increasing numbers are walking the streets in search of work or forced to join with their fellow workmen in strikes in order to obtain even a living wage. Reconstruction schemes are often declared to be too expensive — even at a time when the country is reeking with exposures of the unblushing profiteering that has taken place during the war. Life is worth more than property. If it is right to conscript men it is right to conscript money. The men have done their share. It is now time to force money to do its share.

3. Recognition of the responsibility of the state to provide work for all at such remuneration as will secure a decent standard of living (b) the work-day to be shortened so that all may be employed (c) equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex or nationality.

Under the complex conditions of modern industry, opportunities for employment are not subject to the control of the individual. World markets, trade routes, international treaties, fiscal policies, commercial combinations, financial fluctuations determine whether the worker can find a job. If there is a scarcity of employment, the state with all its facilities for securing information and undertaking new works or deciding upon public policies is in a better position than the individual to find a job. This is recognized in Great Britain and in Europe.

Further, such work ought to be suitable and to be remunerated at a "living wage." A report some years ago by the committee on standards of living and labor of the National Conference of Charities and Correction states: "The welfare of society and the prosperity of the state require for each individual such food, clothing, housing conditions and other necessities, and comforts of life as will secure and maintain physical, mental and moral health. . . The monetary equivalent of a living wage varies according to local conditions, but must include enough to secure the elements of a normal standard of living: to provide for education and recreation; to care for immature

members of the family; to maintain the family during periods of sickness; and to permit of reasonable saving for old age."

Surely this is not asking for too much. Even a horse is worth its hay and oats or a mare worth being kept in idleness while her foal needs her. Yet wage earning men and women rarely attain even this minimum standard of living!

If there is not enough work for all, it is surely the part of common sense to divide it up rather than have a part of the community overworked while the other part stands in idleness. But what about the "pay"? Well, as long as a few profiteers are coining millions there seems to be plenty of "pay". As a matter of fact our modern economic problem is generally recognized to be not primarily one of production but one of distribution.

The farmer who works at times sixteen hours a day looks askance at this proposal to shorten the work day. But if he could be assured that under a different system, he could make as much by working half the time, we think he would not object — and we are quite sure that his wife would not. At one time miners and factory workers in England labored as long as the farmer or the household drudge. Today they receive increasingly more pay for steadily shortening hours. True; the noble lords and dukes get less. Just so the C.P.R. and the machine men and the banks might get less! But that would not be a dreadful calamity.

With regard to the last point, it is surely clear that women must from this time have equal rights with men. Further, if a man is good enough to be admitted to this country he should not be asked or permitted to adopt standards of living lower than those that now obtain, which in reality is what lower wages mean.

4. A constructive scheme for organizing agricultural production. This would involve community settlement, expert advice and financial assistance.

Our "National Policy" is based on the theory that we should in Canada build up manufacturing establishments. The proposed reconstruction policies are simply the old national policy in a new and enlarged form. "By manufacturing in Canada we create local industrial communities, provide employment for labor, trade for merchants and home markets for producers." The same old pre-election cry that for years has enabled a group of manufacturers to exploit this country!

Now Canada is and will be for years primarily an agricultural country. Notwithstanding this we import great quantities of food-stuffs and find the cost of living ever mounting higher. We cannot afford bacon and eggs and vegetables and fruit that our fathers took as a matter of course. And all this time the farmers are almost as badly off as the consumers in the city.

We need a complete reorganization of our whole national policy. Men who want to live on the land ought to be enabled to do so and be able to make a decent living without sacrificing the educational and social opportunities which their family should enjoy.

Even in Great Britain thousands of city dwellers are finding a profitable and delightful existence in the reorganized life of the open country. Why not in Canada?

ECONOMIC CHANGES

Let us try to picture what the new social order would be like—what changes would be involved—and how they could be brought about.

We lack imagination. We accept things as they come to us and imagine that "as it was in the beginning, is now" it "ever shall be world without end." Some men imagined that it might be possible for a man to fly through the air. Others scoffed, "Man had no wings." Dreamers tried to make themselves wings. Some were killed. Again fools, who called themselves practical men, scoffed. The dreamers kept on dreaming and experimenting. Today great airships cross the ocean. The impossible has become a fact.

It may take time to build a new social order, but let us try, as far as we can to draw a plan and then, as opportunity is given us, work to our plan.

1. Socialization of railways, telegraphs, express companies, elevators, docks, stockyards, cold storage plants and other public services of transportation and communication.

These public utilities can no longer be safely left in the control of private individuals or companies. In England, under the pressure of the war, it was found necessary in the interests of efficiency to nationalize many public services. If efficiency demands this in war time, why not in peace times? Again, these public services are essentially monopolistic in character. They should be maintained in the interest of the public welfare and not for private profit.

2. Socialization of mines, timber limits, fisheries, water-powers, electric power and other natural resources socially operated.

These natural resources ought never to have been alienated. They belong essentially to all the people. They must be reclaimed for the people. Limited in number and extent, their possession gives the owners the very power of life and death over those dependent upon them.

3. Socialization of banks and insurance companies. These, too, are essentially public utilities. Credit is the basis of the modern financ-

ial-commercial-industrial-social structure. The control of credit, involving as it does the whole life of the nation, cannot be left in irresponsible hands. Through credit, a few become immensely wealthy, determine the policies of the country, exploit the people or plunge the world into war.

4. The organization of the distribution of food products and raw materials. This is what our English war-economists call national "rationing." Sugar, rubber, wheat are too important to be left to chance distribution. Even national control will be superceded by international control.

6. The progressive socialization—that is, the bringing under national these for producing supplies for public works. At an enormous expense to the country munition plants have been equipped. With modifications these could be made available for the production say of rolling stock or agricultural implements, or blasting powder. Why should not the public have the benefit?

6. The progressive socialization—that is, the bringing under national, provincial, municipal or co-operative ownership and control—of manufacturing establishments and commercial institutions. As the British Labor party puts it, "The Labor party insists on democracy in industry as well as in government. It demands the progressive elimination from the control of industry of the private capitalists, individual or joint stock; and the setting free of all who work, whether by hand or by brain for the service for the community and of the community only."

This process will proceed along various lines. Co-operative enterprises will be extended. Municipalities will not only provide light and water but probably bread and milk. Our Western Provinces might well attend to the coal business or provide farm machinery. With the taking over of the railways by the Federal Government it would be a short step to the building of rolling stock or the providing of supplies. Gradually as standardization went on new enterprises would be taken over by the community.

7. The expropriation of unused lands. Use is the only real title. Too long in our cities those who have built homes have been taxed to increase the land values of others who held their land for speculation. Others, through the rise in values, have been unable to have a home of their own. Too long in this country the interests of women and children have been sacrificed in order that vacant company lands should bring handsome profits. Millions of acres of idle land lie adjacent to the railroads, while settlers must go miles back from the railroads built to serve them.

8. In case of socialization or expropriation suitable provision to be made for the present owners. This is a humane and in the long run economical method of getting through a difficult period.

British action in the case of the coal mines will be watched with interest.

9. During the transition period between private ownership and public ownership all revenues to be derived from the following sources:

(a) Rent of privately used land or other resources not socially operated.

(b) A steeply graduated income tax.

(c) Large private estates at the death of present owners to revert to the state.

Ultimately, the state producing all—and producing only to meet the needs of the people—would control all the revenues, and, taxation as we know it would be unknown. But if the socialization is gradual, schemes must be provided for administration and for financing schemes of socialization. "Granted that it would be a fine thing" for all to have a decent living—but where is the money to come from? We suggest three sources. If, at least for a time, farming operations can be carried on individually, as at present, it is only fair that those making profits out of farming should in the form of taxes pay a certain rent to the state.

But the main source of revenue would be the income tax and the inheritance tax.

The Russian people seem to be more impulsive than the British. In their zeal for speedy reform they confiscated lands and property. The British are much more deliberate, but none the less thorough. The British Labor Party proposes to exempt altogether from taxation moderate incomes. On the larger incomes there will be placed a steeply graduated tax "rising from a penny in the pound on the smallest assessable income up to sixteen or even nineteen shillings in the pound on the highest income of the millionaires." If a man must have the incentive of private gain, the British people say to him "Very well, go to it. Make a million a year but remember at the end of the year we take back in the form of taxes nine hundred thousand of your profits." And this is perfectly constitutional!

Further with regard to the great private estates, the British policy differs from the Russian. The Bolsheviks frankly and promptly confiscated the great estates. The British Labor Party proposes to move in accordance with the recognized procedure of "law and order." Already inheritance taxes are levied. But the underlying principle now recognized is that a man can leave his property to whom he will. The Labor Party would substitute the principle that "naked a man comes into the world and naked he will go out." After making provision for his immediate dependents, his property would revert to the state. Thus the British people would regain the lands and natural resources which have been so lavishly alienated by irresponsible

kings and governments. And all this, mind you, is constitutional! Canada proposes to follow British precedent.

10. Management of industries to be under the joint control of committees representing the administrative body and those engaged in the industry. The city electric system, for example, would be administered by a committee composed of city officials and delegates from the employees. This is democracy in industry.

PROVISION FOR SOCIAL WELFARE

In talking with employers and employees one cannot but be struck by the fact that they regard industry from very different viewpoints.

The employer can tell all about the machinery. He knows the amount of goods produced—their cost and their selling price. He can analyze in detail the cost of each process. He is thinking in terms of profits. He knows or cares very little about the welfare of the men and women and children in his employ. This was expressed clearly if almost brutally by Mr. W. E. Patton before the Cost of Living Committee: "Our mill wasn't built for the glory of God or anybody else. It was built for the benefit of the shareholders."

The employees on the other hand are thinking in terms of wages which they translate into meat for Sunday dinner, shoes for Jack and a dress for Mary. Their thoughts centre around human needs.

That is why the humble laborer is so often right in his judgments and the big employer so often wrong. Shall the city erect a new hospital, introduce higher education, maintain playgrounds? The worker invariably votes "Yes." The business man often thinking of taxes often votes "No." Property rights have had precedence over human rights. The position must be reserved. What provision for social welfare should be made in order that this old world may become a half decent place for our children to live in?

1. Health. Free Medical and Hospital Service. The women of Alberta a few years ago adopted the slogan: "The hospital as free as the public school." Why not? Surely good health is as essential to good citizenship as "book-larnin"—which is still pretty much what our educational system amounts to!

In the army, if a soldier is sick it is felt to be in the interest of the army that he be put in good health as soon as possible. Even if his ill-health is the result of his own carelessness or folly it is none the less imperative that he receive the best attention. Why not the same attitude with regard to our citizens at large?

2. Education. (a) The school age to be raised to sixteen years and every child assured a chance. (b) Vocational training for all. (c) Cultural opportunities for all.

Today despite our compulsory attendance act many children leave school at a very early age with a very imperfect equipment for life. Probably only about five per cent go through high school and only one per cent through the university. This is all wrong. The defects of our vicious economic system must not be visited upon the children. Give one generation a chance and this would be a different world!

When all men are expected to do their share of the world's work it will be very desirable that all are taught to do their work efficiently. Our present hap-hazard methods of preparing for our life work must give place to scientific training. Then, instead of "finishing our education" when we leave school we must throughout life have the opportunity of obtaining a wide and varied culture.

3. Social Insurance Covering Unemployment, Accident, Sickness and Old Age.

The principle of social insurance has been recognized in Great Britain where unemployment benefits and old age pensions are being paid. Very tardily the principle is being introduced into America where we now have workmen's compensation acts and mother's pensions. But payments are as yet altogether inadequate. It is in the interest of the community at large that no one under any circumstances be allowed to fall below a decent standard of living.

4. Highest possible standards of living. (a) Good food, clothing and shelter for all. (b) Leisure and recreational opportunities for all. (c) Suitable provision for immature and sub-normal members of the community.

Instead of seeing what is the lowest figure on which a family can possibly subsist we shall endeavor out of the world's abundance to provide as good a living as possible for all. Instead of destroying quantities of food to keep up the prices or limiting the output of factories because there is no market or monopolizing the land so that there is "no room to dwell in the midst of the land" we shall use freely the natural resources and powers which have been so abundantly provided.

There will be enough for all and to spare—enough even for the unfortunates who cannot "earn a living for themselves" or for the little children too young as yet to take their place.

But more, "man does not live by bread alone." He needs a chance to rest, to relax, to expand his soul. The chief end of man is not to work. It is to live—to live a rich, full, abundant life.

5. The financial burden of race-preservation to be borne by the State.

Here we put forward a proposal at which some will demur. But surely it is reasonable.

We agree that women should receive equal pay for equal work. The practical difficulty is that frequently a man has "a wife and family to support."

That does not however make it right that he should get more for his work of teaching school or operating a machine. As a matter of fact it is his wife who should be paid for bringing up a family. That is the way out.

A woman before she is married is perhaps earning as large a wage as her husband. When she is married he gets no more and her wage stops altogether. Yet she works harder than ever—long hours and work that most women couldn't be paid to do. If she wants a quarter she must beg it from her husband.

After all who has the benefit of the family? As soon as the children are old enough to care for themselves they become part of the great industrial army. Each adult worker is worth say \$5,000 to \$10,000 to the community merely as a working machine. In war time, the State steps in and claims the worker as its own. Yet it rewards the mother not a cent for the years of care and expense involved in producing a citizen.

The State can never repay the mother for the care and affection she has lavished on the child. It can, however, and it should assume the financial burden involved. A mother's work is as necessary and as valuable as that of an office or factory girl. She should receive at least equal pay. The State will one day do more than provide free schools and free text-books for the children. When immigration ceases and the population becomes stationary or begins to shrink we shall awake to the value of the work done by the sex whose emancipation is only beginning.

POLITICAL REFORMS

We speak of our present system as "Representative Government." As a matter of fact our legislative assemblies do not really represent the people. This is due to a number of causes. Only a limited portion of the population has the franchise. In municipal elections property qualifications still prevail for candidates and for electors. Women are only becoming eligible. The shifting character of the work of large groups of industrial workers practically deprives them of privileges of citizenship. The infamous War-times Election Act deliberately barred whole classes likely to vote against Union Government.

Then the party system with its permanent "machines" and spoils system leaves little choice with the electors. A candidate is nominated and financed by each party and at most the ordinary elector has but the choice of the lesser of two evils.

Elections are expensive and the candidate must either spend his own money or accept money from friends or corporations. In the former case he may feel justified in recouping himself, in the latter he is bound to serve the interests of those who secured his election.

So as a matter of fact some 80% of the members of the Dominion House are big business and professional men—a large number of them lawyers. They do not represent the opinion or view point of the ordinary people of Canada. If the confidence of the people is to be restored in our parliamentary system radical changes must take place.

1. Equal rights of citizenship irrespective of sex, class origin, religion or property qualifications.

In no election should Property vote or Property be elected to office. "A man's a man for a' that." Fancy giving a man a vote because he owns a twenty-five foot lot or electing him as school trustee because that lot is worth \$1,000 or making him a senator because he gambled successfully with the one thousand and made it ten thousand!

Fancy depriving a man of a vote because he happened to be born a few miles away in territory over which another flag floated or was brought up to speak another language or worshipped God after another manner than that to which we have been accustomed. No! Good citizenship is the one test of citizenship and in our determination of what constitutes good citizenship, we must allow a wide tolerance as to opinions. This has always been the British policy and we need in these days to beware of copying that which we have denounced as "Prussianism." Tennyson was content to dwell under the cloudy skies of England because there "whether girt with friend or foe a man can speak the thing he will."

2. Within each political district, delegates to the administrative body to be chosen through vocational organization rather than at present according to geographical residence.

This will be recognized and denounced by some as a Soviet Government. Well why not? But as a matter of fact this form of organization is not limited to Russia. It is on this principle that our Trades and Labor Councils are organized. Each craft sends its delegates to the central body.

In a highly industrial society the old geographical system does not seem to meet the needs of the case. For instance six machinists work side by side in the same workshop. They live in six different wards surrounded by shop-keepers, lawyers, doctors, etc. At election times they vote for six different candidates, none of whom probably a machinist and probably none of whom they know personally. Men are more closely united "on the job" than they are by residing in the same district. Why should not the machinists or those engaged in the same industry have their representation?

In times of special need this form of representation is used. Representatives of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, of the Canadian Council of Agriculture and of the Trades and Labor Congress are called in for consultation. If we retain two chambers one chamber might be elected along the old geographical lines.

The latter according the Guild Socialists would continue to represent the whole of the citizens as consumers. The Industrial Councils would represent the citizens as producers.

3. Provision for proportional representation and the initiative, referendum and recall. Even under the new system there would be minorities, and minorities should be represented. The people too should retain the right on occasion to initiate legislation. They should retain the right to be the final court of appeal. They should retain the right to recall their delegates who have ceased to represent them.

4. Complete Sovereignty of Canada. Canada should attain to Kipling's idea "Daughter in her mother's house but mistress in her own." We should have full autonomy—the right to make treaties; the right to finally decide upon our own laws and the right to be represented in international affairs. This not because we are un-British but because we are essentially Britishers. The British Labor Party declares: "We do not intend, by any such 'Imperial Senate' either to bring the plutocracy of Canada and South Africa to the aid of the British aristocracy or to enable the landlords and financiers of the mother country to unite in controlling the growing popular democracies overseas. The absolute autonomy of each self-governing part of the British Empire must be maintained intact."

5. Democratic League of Peoples open to all and involving (a) Free Trade (b) International Council and Courts.

Again read the programme of the British Labor Party. "We disclaim all idea of economic war. We ourselves object to all Protective Customs Tariffs; but we hold that each nation must be free to do what it thinks best for its own economic development without thought of injuring others . . . We stand for the immediate establishment—actually as a part of the treaty of peace . . . of a Universal League of Society of Nations, a Supernational authority with an International High Court to try all justiciable issues between nations; and an International Legislature to enact such common laws as can be mutually agreed upon, and an International Council of Mediation to endeavor to settle without ultimate conflict even those disputes which are not justicable."

Needless to say the League of Nations as now constituted does not realize the dream of the Labor Party.

